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The COVID-19 pandemic led to the Redesign of Library Resources and Services: Turning Crisis into an Opportunity

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Abstract

This paper describes the opportunities to redesign library resources and services during and after the COVID-19 crisis that has affected the lives of billions of people around the world. During this crisis, Universities, colleges, and schools suspended their normal teaching and learning activities. Crisis can sometimes transform challenges into opportunities. A crisis can be turned into an opportunity if new ways of looking, thinking, and responding are embraced. A result of COVID-19's pandemic outbreaks provided an enormous opportunity to change the information-providing way. Thus, libraries can take it as an opportunity to redesign their information resources and services. By redesigning resources and services, they can play a vital role in supporting students, researchers, and teachers. This paper discusses how a library can develop various online operations, innovative services, and connections to the library community to face any challenge in the future.

Keywords: Restructuring, Reengineering, Redesigning, Rethinking, Resources and Services, COVID 19, Crisis, Opportunity.

1. Introduction

The Novel-Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic started in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in China (**Kowalski et al., 2020**). The virus has become a major public health challenge not only for China but also for countries around the world (Phelan et al. 2020). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that can spread from person to person. Essentially, it is a respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath (**Addi, 2020**). Safety measures are necessary to prevent the further spread of the virus and control the pandemic (**Meng, 2020**). Given the safety measures, most governments had temporarily closed all educational facilities. These national closings have affected the world's million student population.

Therefore, this situation compelled one and all to think and change the traditional learning method on a phenomenal scale. Libraries around the globe had been facing a big challenge in terms of their decisions regarding what services/support they could still offer to their users. In fact, the government authorities have themselves taken different approaches; they've ordered the closure of all institutions, and at others, they have stated that 'normal' life should resume. A challenge is an opportunity to renew the mission of becoming digitally competent **(Martzoukou, 2021)**, and various stakeholders have realized that bridging the digital divide is necessary in order to meet future challenges **(Ameen, 2021)**. Libraries, as a social organization, are responsible for ensuring the establishment of the World Coalition for Education to help countries expand their best practices in remote learning. To meet the demands of a changing environment, libraries are transitioning from traditional services to a more tech-driven approach **(Adedokun and Komolafe-Opadeji, 2021)**. Digital libraries and distributors have adapted to the situation by offering more free and personalized materials so that users can read and learn continuously. Undoubtedly, as the interest in dependable e-resources has increased, libraries have become a major route to high-quality e-books, journals, and educational content (**Falt and Das, 2020**). The COVID-19 pandemic forced the library to reconsider its work, and try to engage users in a creative way by providing online resources and services, social media posts, phone calls, and reminding students of its public lectures online. Thus, in a pandemic situation, library professionals have gotten an opportunity as new ways of doing work and providing information remotely to the whole

community (**Bhati and Kumar, 2020**). Libraries can continue to maintain, develop and improve these services to face future crises.

2. Rethinking Library operations and services

Libraries contain print and electronic materials but with time new ways of storing information has emerged and libraries are changing accordingly. Library staff worked remotely on their library's websites, pointing students to the wide variety of resources available online. The Information Desk has been replaced with online chat, emails, phone calls, and extensive guides that can be accessed through library websites (**Delaney et al., 2020).** Today, libraries are witnessing and participating in the transition to online learning that has been around since COVID-19 **(Zhou, 2021)**. Libraries have created a unique way to protect the health and safety of users. This is an attempt to identify the key services and functions that libraries can restructure or created new during the crisis and can provide to their users. The actions that the library can perform during this period of buildings closure are the following.

2.1. Greater Emphasis on Circulation of Physical books/videos etc.

Libraries around the world have faced difficulties in providing physical services. In an effort to keep our communities safe, the libraries had closed all the premises and had switched to a virtual service model. For example, the OSU library are providing a large collection of digital documents; in fact, most library services are accessible remotely today through the use of ICT. Interestingly, for library users who aren't habitual to using technology for accessing e-resources, they could request the same by calling up the library. Importantly, in these times of crisis, library users are notified when a book or chapter becomes available. It also helps in prioritizing the required course content in order to make the users' life easy. There are some following operations and services that any library can use during crises.

2.1.1. Delivery of physical materials through drone

Although the buildings are closed during crises, all libraries can support community members who do not have internet access. Libraries could also extend the drone delivery service to provide the required printed books to the users at the comfort of their homes.

2.1.2. Document scanning

Libraries can also look to create document scanning services to digitize documents that are required for users and deliver them by email or other multimedia devices. In the interest of public health and safety, Saint-Paul University, Minnesota State University, and University of Western Australia Libraries have sent a scanned copy of the required document through e-mail.

2.1.3. Temporary print purchase and delivery services

If a user needs a book on an urgent basis, and there is no electronic or printed version available in the library, the library could attempt to change its purchase policy. After receiving the request from the users, the library could directly place an order to the vendor for direct supply to the users' home address. The Cornell University Library has applied this temporary print purchase mechanism while delivering the same to the user's home during these times.

2.2. Greater Emphasis on Provide Access to Digital Services

By and large, libraries can seek to support research and education by providing access to their digital collection. UNESCO launched a Global Education Coalition to help countries expand their best practices in remote learning. Digital libraries and publishers have made their moves in this direction. As the demand for reliable electronic resources has increased, digital libraries are becoming vital destinations for high-quality electronic educational

content. As such, many libraries have started the transition from print to digital versions of information resources. Libraries and their staff have come together with the goal of not only providing access to information but also educating and training students and researchers on how to utilize e-resources (**Jeyaraj, 2021**). Therefore, libraries could possibly enter into a collaboration agreement with publishers to access hundreds of their books online; this would help in turn the students, faculty, and staff. Notably, digital access to collection services is being ramped up, and libraries could provide additional services by possibly providing extra resource links on the landing page of their websites.

2.2.1. National digital library of India (NDL)

The NDL India is established at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, which is collaborating with libraries in Indian educational institutions, public libraries as well as big international libraries to get free access to books on a wide range of subjects through their platform (**Bashir et al., 2019** and **Singh, 2022**). It also proposes to help students prepare for entrance exams and competitions, enable people to learn and prepare from best practices from around the world, and facilitate interdependent research from a variety of sources.

2.2.2. Provide a link to access Free/Open e-resources

The library can constantly be updated with free/open digital resources, including e-books, e-journals, E-Theses & Dissertations, MOOCs, and Open CourseWare widely recognized by experts in the field. Key subject resources are easily accessible online. The library specializes in collecting such resources and can provide links to students and faculty so that they can easily access them when they need to conduct effective research.

2.2.3. Mobile app for e-books/audio-books

The eBook/audio book mobile apps are playing an important role in extending the library's electronic collection. The library can aware of the users regarding mobile apps so that they can download e-books/audiobooks and videos by using the preinstalled app on their phones and putting the huge collections of the library in their pockets. Most libraries around the world i.e the IIT Delhi library are providing such services to users.

2.2.4. Links to resources from other organizations

To assist users in these uncertain times, the library can also provide free links to information resources maintained by other organizations. Resources available between not-for-profit organizations are often seen as a response to limited resources and to increase client and operational needs. Libraries, in particular, may consider sharing resources to deal with the crisis based on their viability. However, sharing resources between libraries can bring some positive benefits, including increased organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The principles of effective collaboration with the practical aspects of service delivery can further ensure the future viability of organizations; it may be the method of successful organizations in the future.

2.2.5. Create a resource guide for temporary access to electronic resources

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many publishers and vendors had also been making all or part of their content available online for free for a limited period of time. To help teachers, staff and students navigate these resources in a crisis situation; libraries can possibly create a resource guide for listing out these offers by using quality and relevance criteria, study programs, and confidentiality issues. The library at the University of Arizona had been successfully practicing this. OCLC also has been maintaining a growing list of this freely available content at oc.lc/covid19-partner-content.

2.2.6. Electronic course reserves

Students need access to study materials, and the library staff works hard to provide them electronically. During the crisis, libraries can create e-reservation of study materials so that they can provide most of the study materials as per users' needs. Users could look to use new

online reserve forms to study materials. Libraries could support the faculty, researcher, and students by choosing alternative teaching materials. In fact, many libraries had suspended the reservation services of printed materials during COVID-19, and provide an electronic reserve course link, such as the Simon Fraser University Library.

2.2.7. Virtual library assistance

The global networking environment has enabled users to receive virtual help in the library from their desks, regardless of their physical location. Libraries, which increasingly include these remote users, have attempted to provide reference services without face-to-face communication, attempting to meet the needs and expectations of the users. Virtual assistance can be provided through telephone, e-mail, video kiosks, live chat, contact us, create ask a librarian, subject specialists tools, online consultations, and meet with us (via Zoom or Teams), all accessible through the library website. For example, the University of Western Australia and Smith College libraries have been providing virtual library assistance to users.

2.2.8. Online support for researcher

Libraries strive to continuously support researchers. Library staff can create an online guide to provide remote assistance in finding, using, and sharing information related to research, as well as copyright assistance. Drexel University library, for instance, is providing access to valuable tools and resources to support researchers by sharing links to find funding opportunities & partnerships, Research Data Management Support, Writing & Publishing, and Research Guides & Tutorials.

2.2.9. Author on your screen services

A virtual meeting with a book author is a great way to connect readers with the magic of book reading. The library manages book writer virtual meetings and uploads the schedule of the meeting on the website. Creating a virtual author meeting is a way to increase the interest of users in reading and writing. Virtual connections can be just as important as personal events for today's users who are used to connecting online. The Dutch National Library has partnered to provide an ‘author on your screen’ service.

2.3. Greater Emphasis on Virtual activities and Create new ones

Libraries today, have almost been working 24 hours a day; they’re committed to delivering remote services to their users under incredibly complex circumstances. Libraries are not just physical spaces anymore; in fact, many of the libraries, which had closed their buildings, had could continue to interact with user communities, and participate in virtual programming i.e. Offering children‘s events such as storytimes, through virtual outlets like Facebook Live or Instagram‘s IGTV **(James et al., 2021)**, virtual book clubs, engage in sharing content on social media, online chats. Connecting with user communities is the core value of the library. The following virtual program can be fruitful for libraries to connect with the community.

2.3.1. Organize virtual transcription

It is an online transcription platform where anyone with an internet connection can transcribe documents from the library and create digital documents. During leisure time, people can be encouraged to make data more practical and accessible by learning new skills and learning to read old handwriting forms. Finally, it’s easy for people to search for keywords, for example, the Library of Congress organizes virtual transcription for remote participation of people.

2.3.2. Organizing virtual exhibitions

Digital platforms allow the library to stay in touch with users by organizing an exhibition of information resources. We can learn the importance of creative programming that goes beyond the walls of the library, directly to users’ communities during the closures today. Libraries would now have to practically involve their audience in order to maintain a vital

role as a resource for education, health, and social discourse. This virtual exhibit reveals many of the hopes and beliefs of past generations. As Association of European Research, Rare Book and Manuscript, Smithsonian, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France have launched virtual exhibitions.

2.3.3. Create online book reading group

In crises, users cannot get together personally to talk about all the books, and what is the alternative? The answer is only one online book club. An online book club gives an opportunity to get together and discuss the latest readings. Now is the perfect time to make it practical. There are a number of ways to create an online book club, such as social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), connecting via video conferencing apps and websites, FaceTime, and Google Hangouts, and can create a WhatsApp group. Such as Sefton libraries have created an online reading group on the Facebook page.

2.3.4. Focused on YouTube channel

Nowadays, YouTube is an emerging tool that can help the library in a more advanced way. Libraries can post videos on their channels and ask questions about them. There is no limit on time, and the number of users' questions and can view and learn from the library instructions on the YouTube channel. Nowadays almost every library has a YouTube channel. The best YouTube channels are the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Library, British Library, Library of Congress, and CILIP Launch National Shelf Service.

2.3.5. Promoting online story times

Create an activity page on your library website and share the actions you create on social media. This type of editing works particularly well. Share the direct link title of the story on social networks. Libraries can adapt virtual storytelling services to meet the needs of their users when buildings are closed. Massachusetts Libraries System is providing the storytimes services for its users.

2.3.6. Organize online Quiz and writing competition

The library could also organize an online quiz and writing competition to engage users at home. Through this online activity, the library can give users the opportunity to test and develop their knowledge and writing skill. The library may decide to give prizes and certificates to the winner of the contest and encourage users to take part in the program.

2.3.7. To run arts and cultural projects

In the arts and culture society, the impact of postponing or canceling participation can harm the public arts more than most. Closed events, such as specific artist selection panels and a workshop, can successfully be conducted via remote access. The library, as a project team, can organize a platform to move the project forward. Implementing available technological products such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts and Facebook Live sessions, etc. can complete the project.

2.3.8. A drive-through service

Other services, such as helping needy people in finding a job, may become increasingly important. The drive-through service is a type of export service provided by a library to those who need to be hired. Libraries like Miami-Dede and Hillsboro are actively working on such services that allow the people to provide unemployment forms. The unemployed should follow libraries' websites and social media handles if libraries make these methods available in the coming days.

2.3.9. Deploying library 3D printers

Libraries are always dedicated to providing social services during a crisis. For example, Ruth Lilly Medical Library had launched initiatives for deploying their 3D printers for making protective equipment during COVID-19.

2.3.10. Coordinating local services and information

Library staff could now make a plan to connect and support the health sector efforts. The library could work with other city partners to open a homeless shelter where all programs and activities have been canceled. Other members of the library can also be encouraged to serve the community as part of a comprehensive plan for the continuity of municipal services.

2.3.11. Focus on professional development program

Libraries have noted an increased need for professional development opportunities as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected staff responsibilities. They switched to virtual services, and many libraries were working to remedy the situation of staff development programs via webinars to learn more about the current role of staff, and how it can be developed, especially in times of crisis. Libraries can also try to develop a think tank to discuss what they could do for the resumption of the services in crisis. It can be particularly helpful since libraries are making dramatic changes in their systems during the crisis period.

3. Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world awaited a wonderful test. Changing strategies and techniques were essential to control and reduce the risk of spreading this infection in the community. The library is the place where lots of users come to fulfill their academic information requirements. Libraries were closed during COVID-19 as a safety measure. In the lockdown, libraries had been facing new, multiplying difficulties, including services to meet the urgent needs of users. In any type of situation, libraries are expected to contribute to the general well-being and provide routine services to regular users. They continue to play a key role in any pandemic, even if buildings are closed, and can work remotely to ensure better health and safety.

It is possible to transform a crisis into an opportunity if new ways of thinking, looking, and responding are adopted. Pandemic outbreak COVID-19 provided an excellent opportunity to change the way information is provided. During or in the future to face any crisis, the Library can switch to opportunities for development, which can make it extremely innovative. It is recommended that library should redesign their functions, resources, and services, work for remote education, and establish the services to restore the funds of the organizations and employees concerned. In conclusion, COVID-19 taught us something positive about redesigning academic libraries, how to sustain a service that relies on physical resources and that online learning may last longer than we had anticipated. It is the social responsibility of our librarians and information staff to provide information access to users.

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